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CIHR– INSTITUTE OF POPULATION & PUBLIC HEALTH

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POP NEWS

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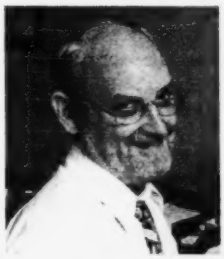
Message from the Scientific Director

In this issue of POP News, you will learn about a number of our initiatives such as our plans with the Institutes of Genetics and Human Development, Child and Youth Health to explore the feasibility of launching a multigenerational birth cohort study, a first-ever in Canada (see page 2). I am particularly gratified to see the third annual Summer Institute come to fruition, which will be offered to 60 masters and PhD students in population and public health (PPH) and health services and policy research (right column, this page). You will also find the usual updates on recently funded research development grant projects and funding opportunities of interest to PPH researchers.

We are delighted to be working closely with the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA) and the Canadian Institute for Health Information-Canadian Population Health Initiative (CIHI-CPHI) through joint sponsorship of "research-policy-practice" panel discussions on such topics as the relationship between housing and health, as well as income and health. We will also be announcing the recipients of our inaugural masters and PhD student awards jointly offered with CPHI and CPHA. We hope to see many of you in St. John's at the Association's annual conference in mid June (see page 3).

As always, please email any of our staff with your comments and suggestions about what you would like to read about in POP news. We look forward to hearing from you.



John Frank,
Scientific Director

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2004 Summer Institute

We are pleased to announce the upcoming 3rd annual Summer Institute entitled: "Negotiating the Shoals of Applied Research in Population and Public Health and Health Services and Policy Research" to be held in Whistler, BC from June 12 –16th, 2004. The CIHR Institutes of Population and Public Health (IPPH), and Health Services and Policy Research (IHSPR); the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation (CHSRF); and the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIAR) are funding this year's Summer Institute. The Western Regional Training Centre for Health Services Research (WRTC), the Partners in Community Health Research Training Program (PCHR) and the Research in Addiction and Mental Health Policy and Services Training Program (RAMPS) are locally hosting the event.

This unique training opportunity will bring together researchers, students, and decision-makers from a variety of disciplines. The Institute will provide an intensive learning experience focusing on the challenges in planning, execution, and translation of knowledge in applied health services and policy (HSP), or population and public health (PPH) research undertaken in collaboration with decision-makers.

Applications from students in graduate training and post-doctoral fellows in applied HSP or PPH research from across Canada were invited on a competitive basis, given the limited number of spaces available. Congratulations to all the students who were invited to attend. We hope to report on the outcome of this event in the next issue of POP News.

CIHR IRSC

A Multigenerational Birth Cohort for Canada

In recent decades, there have been worrisome increases among children in Canada in rates of obesity and asthma, and there appear to be increases in some behavioural and psychological problems such as autism, depression and hyperactivity/attention deficit and conduct disorders.

But the fact is we don't yet understand very much about the underlying causes of these conditions, some of which have lifelong health consequences.

Since 2001, three institutes of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (Population and Public Health, Genetics, and Human Development, Child and Youth Health) have been exploring the feasibility of a long-term birth cohort study into the health and development of Canadian children.

More information is needed about the various risk factors that could be modified to reduce the occurrence of troubling childhood conditions and illnesses. In particular, we need to know more about the interrelationship of early life experiences and exposures (environmental and social) with inherited genetic vulnerabilities. A cohort study, which would follow subjects closely from birth until adulthood, would help to illuminate the causes of the increasingly common conditions of early (and later) life.

Several countries, recognizing the power of such birth cohort studies, are currently either mounting studies or have plans to do so. Each has their particular focus. For example, a proposed U.S. study would emphasize the impact of environmental pollutants while a proposed Australian study would concentrate on social factors and educational influences on childhood development.

The CIHR-led cohort study would combine the measurement and analysis of both genetic and environmental risk factors, and holds the promise of unraveling complex causal pathways for increasingly common childhood conditions. Many potential health and development "trajectories" are possible for each of us in infancy and childhood, but some are selected by the influence, especially in early life, of specific environments on our genes.

Canada is in a unique position to launch such a birth cohort study for several reasons. Our single payer health system in each province, and coordinated system of health and vital statistics, enable us to ethically link survey data with administrative datasets, especially in some provinces. This country also has brilliant scientific talent in the disciplines that are key to its design and execution — reproductive and developmental biology, neurosciences, genetics, and various branches of epidemiology and biostatistics.

The trans-disciplinary teams essential for such a study's success would greatly accelerate the development of a more integrated Canadian health research capacity and create multiple spin-off benefits for Canada and the world. Knowledge generated from such a study would benefit new "healthy public policies", preventive measures, diagnostic tests and treatments to improve the health status of entire populations.

While the study focus will be on childhood, it is noteworthy that science is beginning to find unexpectedly strong links between early life experiences, specific environmental exposures and health related conditions, and the occurrences of potentially lethal and often disabling diseases of later life.

Because literally hundreds of specific "spin off" studies can be launched from a given cohort over succeeding decades, such a birth cohort study would act as a *platform* for subsequent research. Only "core" data collection and storage costs need to be funded directly within the essential cohort infrastructure. More specific studies, making use of questionnaire and examination data, and stored biological samples, can be funded as new scientific opportunities and societal needs emerge.

Of course, complex ethical, legal and social issues must be considered at every stage of the design and implementation of a birth cohort study. To that end, a full time legal scholar has been recruited by the CIHR to ensure a coordinated approach to these issues for both the proposed birth cohort study and the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging (CLSA) — an initiative of the CIHR Institute of Aging which is at a more advanced stage. (A major CLSA design contract has already been competitively awarded to a consortium of more than 200 Canadian investigators with three principal investigators.)

The three CIHR Institutes involved with the birth cohort proposal have held several planning workshops over the last two years. A February 2003 workshop included scientists from several countries planning or executing cohort studies, which share a goal of uncovering the causes of the most common multi-factorial diseases. Canadian and international scientists also interacted with researchers involved with the CLSA.

The term "multigenerational birth cohort" was coined at the February workshop and further reinforced at the recent March 2004 workshop. Specifically, researchers discussed the advantages of recruiting at least some mothers and fathers preconception and also of including at least some information and blood samples for genetic analysis from as many of the siblings and grandparents as possible. Many fundamental scientific issues about the design of a Canadian National Birth Cohort platform remain, and must be resolved before seeking wider input into the process. The March 2004 Toronto workshop helped to further address some of these questions and was attended by international and national experts. Subsequent steps include the establishment of a smaller steering group to bring the project forward and the examination of various design options for implementing a multigenerational cohort study, that takes advantage of Canada's strengths but is affordable and acceptable to a wide array of Canadian stakeholders.

Canadian Public Health Association 95th Annual Conference June 13-16, 2004, St. John's, Newfoundland

Building on population health in our communities to create and enhance linkages between research, policy and practice.

Objectives:

1. To provide an opportunity for a dialogue among public health practitioners, policy makers and researchers which will impact on the direction of population health.
2. To highlight qualitative and quantitative population health research and describe initiatives that have been successful in the translation of research to policy and practice.
3. To highlight the impact of policy creation on population health outcomes in our communities.
4. To facilitate the sharing of health outcome evaluations of community health projects and programs.
5. To share information generated by the Canadian Population Health Initiative in the areas of population health research, policy analysis and knowledge transfer.
6. To capitalize on the experiences of public health practitioners by creating an environment that encourages sharing of population health practice initiatives and contributes to professional growth and a body of expertise.

Charting the Course, Progress Report: Two Years Later — How Are We Doing?

In the fall of 2001, the Canadian Population Health Initiative (CPHI) of the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) and the Institute of Population and Public Health (IPPH) of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) collaborated on a ten-city, pan-Canadian consultation to identify priorities for population and public health (PPH) research and knowledge transfer. More than 400 participants took part in the consultations, which were intended to inform strategic planning for both CPHI and IPPH, and to ensure that the two organizations were working together to address key PPH priorities. In May 2002, the two organizations produced the document *Charting the Course* (CTC), which outlined the main themes and issues that emerged from the consultations.

Two years after the consultations, IPPH and CPHI are reporting back to consultation participants and other interested parties on progress to date in responding to the key themes and issues that were identified. The Progress report lists the activities and plans of the two organizations for each area: priority research themes; research methods, standards of evidence, and data infrastructure issues; and knowledge transfer and priorities (moving from transfer to exchange). A copy of the report is available at: http://secure.cihi.ca/cihiweb/dispPage.jsp?cw_page=GR_201_E.

Recently Funded Initiatives in 2003-2004

Results of the CIHR RFA "Advancing Theories, Frameworks, Methods and Measurement In Health Services & Policy, Population and Public Health Research and Knowledge Translation"

CIHR's Institutes of Population and Public Health and Health Services and Policy Research, in partnership with the Institute of Aging, the Institute of Nutrition, Metabolism and Diabetes and the Ethics Office, recently funded 29 projects to support research likely to lead to new breakthroughs in advancing theories, conceptual frameworks, research methods or measurement approaches (qualitative or quantitative) that have broad application to health services, systems and policy research and population and public health research, or to understanding the translation of research into a strengthened Canadian health care system and improved health for Canadians. For a complete list of funded applications, please visit the CIHR website at: http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/publications/20368.shtml

Results of the Institute Strategic Initiative: Public Health and Health Care System Preparedness and Response to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS): Evaluation and Lessons Learned

The CIHR Institutes of Health Services and Policy Research, Population and Public Health, Infection and Immunity, Aging, Circulatory and Respiratory Health, the CIHR Ethics Office and the Canadian Lung Association are pleased to announce funding for the RFA entitled: Public Health and Health Care System Preparedness and Response to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS): Evaluation and Lessons Learned. The intent of this RFA is to examine and analyze the recent public health and health care system responses to the SARS outbreak in Canada, in the context of the global epidemic. Special emphasis is placed on ways to ensure that evidence-based practice, and cost-effective outbreak management strategies, are utilized to the maximum extent possible in any future outbreaks of this kind. A total of 10 applications were approved for funding. A complete list of funded applications can be found on the CIHR website at: http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/publications/22058.shtml

Results of the CIHR RFA "Global Health Research Pilot Project Grants"

The CIHR Institute of Population and Public Health (Lead), in partnership with the Institutes of Aboriginal Peoples' Health, Circulatory and Respiratory Health, Gender and Health, Health Services and Policy Research, Infection and Immunity, Neurosciences, Mental Health and Addiction, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Health Canada (HC), and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) are pleased to jointly announce the results of the competition for the RFA "Global Health Research Pilot Project Grants" (GLA and GLB). The intent of this competition is to allow investigators in Canada in full partnership with researchers resident in low and middle-income countries (including researchers representing the needs of vulnerable populations in rich countries), to explore novel ideas and observations and conduct pilot studies and/or gather evidence necessary to determine the viability of new global health research directions. For a complete list of funded applications, please visit the CIHR website at: http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/publications/21589.shtml

Reducing Health Disparities & Promoting Equity for Vulnerable Populations - Pilot Project Grants and Development Grants – Competition Results

CIHR's 13 Institutes, in collaboration with CIHR's Ethics Office, Health Canada, the National Secretariat on Homelessness, the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council have funded 20 Pilot Projects and 13 Development Grants designed to build research capacity to document, analyze, and contribute to reducing health disparities and to promote equity for vulnerable populations. Funding provided through this initiative will enable interdisciplinary groups of researchers in health and other sectors to develop programs of research that describe, investigate and ultimately reduce health disparities; and/or support innovative, high risk, pilot or feasibility research in the area of health disparities and vulnerable populations. A complete list of funded applications is available on the CIHR website at: http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/publications/20536.shtml

Marie Curie Action Programs:

All Expenses Paid Researcher Exchange Canada-Europe

The European Union's Marie Curie Actions program offers generous grants for Canadians to work in Europe and for Europeans to work in Canada. There are four types of Marie Curie "Actions":

Individual Driven Actions, for researchers with *more than 4 years* research experience or a doctorate,

Host Driven Actions, essentially for researchers with *less than 4 years* of research experience, or no doctorate,

Excellence Promotion and Recognition, these are awards for those *already participating* in the Marie-Curie Action; and,

Return and Reintegration Mechanisms, for those *with European passports* who wish to live there again for a number of years.

All Calls for proposals can be found at http://fp6.cordis.lu/fp6/calls_activity.cfm?ID_ACTIVITY=594

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NEW Funding Opportunities with CIHR

IPPH is pleased to announce the following upcoming IPPH-related funding opportunities:

RFA: Excellence, Innovation and Advancement in the Study of Obesity and Healthy Body Weight—Childhood Obesity: Operating and Pilot Project Grants (led by the CIHR Institute of Nutrition, Metabolism and Diabetes)
Launch: June 2004
Registration Deadline: October, 2004

RFA: Pilot Project Grants in Strategic Health Services and Policy Research Theme Areas (led by the CIHR Institute of Health Services and policy Research)
Launch: June 2004
Registration Deadline: October 1, 2004

Priority Announcements: Additional opportunities for support through CIHR's Open Competition process—Fall 2004 Competitions
Launch: June 2004
Registration Deadlines:

A) Operating Grants: August 15, 2004
B) Fellowships: October 1, 2004
C) Doctoral Research Awards: October 15, 2004

JUNE LAUNCH: http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/services/15761.shtml#june04

Other Recent IPPH-Related Competition Results

Fall 2003 IPPH Priority Announcement:

* **New Investigators**: http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/publications/22002.shtml
* **Operating Grants**: http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/publications/20453.shtml

Safe Food and Water Initiative: Microbial Contamination of Food and Water and Antimicrobial Resistance in the Food Chain - Phase II - Establishing a Framework:
http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/publications/20440.shtml

Environmental Approaches to Physical Activity, Healthy Eating, and Healthy Body Weight - Planning and Development Grant Competition:
http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/publications/22034.shtml

Compelling Values: Privacy, Access to Data and Health Research:
http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/publications/20550.shtml